

**Neighborhood Ten Study
Public Meeting I
Summarized Notes
June 11, 2005**

- *Land Use, Zoning and Urban Design*
- *Housing*
- *Transportation*

Staff present: Stuart Dash, Elaine Thorne, Taha Jennings, Janice Appleyard, Susanne Rasmussen, Les Barber, Chris Cotter, Cassie Arnaud, Juan Avendano

Welcome and Introductions

Stuart Dash, the Director of Community Planning in the Community Development Department, welcomed meeting participants. Taha Jennings, neighborhood planner in the Department introduced other city staff present, and also acknowledged members of the Study Committee that were present. Background information was presented regarding how neighborhood studies, and the associated recommendations, are used throughout the City, the role of the Study Committee and their discussions to date, as well as the role of the general public in the neighborhood study process, and the format of today's meeting.

Land Use, Zoning, Urban Design

Les Barber, Director of Land Use and Zoning in the Community Development Department, gave a brief presentation on land use, urban design, and zoning in Neighborhood Ten. The draft recommendations for land use, zoning, and urban design in Neighborhood Ten, which were formed through discussions of the Study Committee, were then shared with meeting attendees. Meeting participants had the opportunity to ask questions and offer comments regarding the draft recommendations.

Draft Land Use, Zoning, and Urban Design Recommendations (as presented at the June 11, 2005 public meeting)

General zoning

- Analyze the potential buildout of Neighborhood Ten over the next 20 to 30 years.
- New development in Neighborhood Ten should take into account future traffic patterns, urban design, and the desired long-term character of the neighborhood.
- There is general satisfaction with the current character of the residential districts in the neighborhood. Strategies for protecting the character of residential districts in the neighborhood should be explored, including through the use of zoning regulations and historical districts where appropriate.

Mount Auburn Hospital site

- The Study Committee supports a public process to address long-term development issues at the Mount Auburn Hospital site, including the next phases of development, traffic and parking, and buildout at the site over the next 20-30 years.

Fresh Pond Parkway

- Explore the potential of creating a neighborhood village in the commercial area along Fresh Pond Parkway.
- Any new development along Fresh Pond Parkway should enhance the area as a neighborhood destination and create improved urban design.
- Increase pedestrian amenities along Fresh Pond Parkway, in order to better connect to other areas of the neighborhood.
- Balance pedestrian and automotive needs along the Fresh Pond Parkway.

Star Market site

- There should be adequate public review for any new development at the Star Market site on Mount Auburn Street.
- Any new development at the Star Market site should protect the quality of the neighborhood.

Marsh District, Huron Village, Concord Avenue

- Change the C2 zoning in the Marsh District (bounded by Sparks, Willard, and Mount Auburn Streets) so that it more closely matches the small frame houses currently there.
- Protect the character of Huron Village as a neighborhood destination.
- Explore pedestrian based commercial opportunities along Concord Avenue.

Discussion

Someone asked how the Weed Zoning Petition, which was recently before the planning board, fit in to the zoning discussion. There was another question regarding the possibility of the post office returning to the Huron Drug site. A meeting participant asked what determines what can happen at the Mount Auburn Star Market site. It was noted that while there are no official proposals to redevelop the site, it is a large parcel, which may be redeveloped in the future. Les Barber explained that the zoning currently allows a height of 35 feet and floor area ratios (FAR) of 1.75 and 1.0 for residential and non-residential uses respectively.

Someone expressed concern with Lowell Park, which is owned by the State through the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), and in particular, the poor condition of some of the benches in the park. It was asked if City ownership of the park was possible.

A meeting attendee wanted to know what a revitalized village along Fresh Pond Parkway means and how that might be possible.

Someone asked if bicycle and pedestrian access and or amenities could be required on private property through zoning regulations. Susanne Rasmussen noted that they could, and in many cases are.

Someone pointed out that Residential A zoning districts allow denser development than Residential B zoning districts.

There was concern with the amount of square feet of development permitted at the Mount Auburn Hospital site.

There was a question about the status of the Chinese restaurant at Vassal Lane and Fresh Pond Parkway specifically with regards to snow removal responsibilities at the corner.

Concern was expressed about short notice given to neighborhood residents when a large project is proposed. Someone also pointed out that current zoning conflicts seem to be more intense.

Housing

Chris Cotter, the Director of Housing in the Community Development Department, gave a presentation on the City's affordable housing policies and programs. Including information on:

- Income guidelines for affordable housing
- The Cambridge housing market
- The Cambridge Affordable Housing Trust
- City-sponsored housing programs

The draft study recommendations for housing were then presented and meeting attendees again had an opportunity to ask questions and offer comments.

Draft Housing Recommendations (as presented at the June 11, 2005 public meeting):

- The Study Committee supports the City's affordable housing programs and policies.
- If the Star Market site on Mount Auburn Street is redeveloped in the future, it should be a mixed-use development with a housing and commercial mix.
- It is important to balance the affordable housing needs of Neighborhood Ten with quality of life issues such as density, traffic, and parking demands.
- The possibility of allowing in-law or accessory units should be explored, while considering the quality of life issues and concerns of the neighborhood.
- The effect of new university housing and new residential developments on the housing market should be examined.
- Concern regarding the assessment of some two-family residences in the neighborhood as two separate condominium units.

Discussion

In response to a questions regarding Section 8 funding, staff explained that new vouchers for the program have been cut from the federal budget and the waiting lists are closed. Someone inquired if some kind of non federally funded Section 8 program was possible. In response, it was noted that there has been a state program for a number of years but it lacked funding.

A meeting attendee asked if there were any affordable housing units in West Cambridge (Neighborhood Ten). It was noted that as part of the inclusionary housing ordinance, the new housing development on Aberdeen Avenue would include 6 affordable units, (5 one bedrooms, and 1 two bedroom), ranging in price from \$145,000 to \$165,000.

Someone expressed concern regarding residents being priced out of the neighborhood due to increasing property taxes.

Transportation

Susanne Rasmussen, Director of Environmental and Transportation Planning in the Community Development Department gave an overview of the transportation initiatives in the City as well as some of the policies behind them:

- Vehicle Trip Reduction Ordinance, 1992
- Growth Policy Document
- 1998 Parking and Transportation Demand Management (PTDM) Ordinance
- 2000 Pedestrian Plan
- Climate Protection Plan 2002

Susanne noted that less than 20% of trips in Cambridge are related to work. The City assumes a 0.5% increase per year in traffic. However, these are only assumptions and can be affected by things such as economic cycle. There has also been a significant increase in car ownership. It was noted that there is evidence that transportation programs and initiatives are having an effect. According to U.S. Census data, between 1990 and 2000, fewer people that live in Cambridge drove to work. The general breakdown of work trips is 25% walk, 25% transit, and 4% bicycling. However, it is hard to get information on non-work trips.

Juan Avendano, the Traffic Calming Project Manager in the Community Development Department, explained that the City selects locations for transportation improvements such as traffic calming and re-striping based on other infrastructure work that is planned for a given street.

Because the Study Committee did not complete discussions on potential transportation recommendations before the public meeting, a list of transportation *issues*, which were discussed by the Study Committee, was presented to meeting attendees instead.

Transportation issues discussed by the Study Committee (as presented at the June 11, 2005 public meeting):

Sign Changes

- Install a no trucks no buses sign on Fresh Pond Parkway eastbound in advance of Huron Avenue to give drivers advance notice.
- Install a no turns for trucks and buses on Brattle Street at Fresh Pond Parkway
- Review the current location of the Do not Block intersection sign on Brattle Street at Lexington street
- Repair or replace signs on Larchwood Drive and Larch Road.

Traffic Signal / lane configuration changes

- Address queues at the intersection of Mount Auburn Street and Coolidge Ave.
- Address queues of intersections of Brattle Street Fresh Pond Parkway that block Lexington Street
- Address queues from the intersection of Brattle Street Fresh Pond Parkway that block Larch Road and Fresh Pond Lane

- Increase walk time for pedestrian at the intersection of Huron Ave Fresh Pond Parkway

Enforcement

- Enforce truck and bus restrictions on Fresh Pond Parkway and Memorial Drive
- Enforce truck speeds on neighborhood streets, especially Brattle Street
- Enforce the no double parking rules to reduce delays to MBTA bus routes
- Enforce snow removal regulations to keep sidewalks and curb ramps clear for pedestrians and wheelchair users.

Design Changes

- Improve the unsafe pedestrian crosswalk on Memorial Drive at Hawthorne
- Create bike route into Harvard Square from Brattle Street

Traffic Calming Locations

- Intersection of Reservoir Street Vassal Lane Walden Street
- Huron Avenue Chilton Street, Gurney Street
- Mount Auburn Street at Hawthorne Street, Sparks Street and Willard Street
- Grozier Road at Fresh Pond Parkway
- Lakeview Avenue at Brattle Street and Huron Ave
- Concord Ave at Madison

General Issues

- Neighborhood concern regarding traffic with no destination or origin in Cambridge traveling through Neighborhood ten
- Traffic growth trends and zoning changes reducing anticipated traffic growth
- The effect and role of the Segway transporter
- Keeping the elevator in Harvard Square properly working

Discussion

Bicycle and pedestrian alternatives for connecting to the Fresh Pond area were noted as important. Also noted were bicycle connections to Linear Park from the Fresh Pond Parkway area. Further, if the Watertown Branch of the railroad is abandoned it should be converted into a pathway for bicycle and pedestrian uses. A meeting attendee asked if cars are required to stay off of bicycle lanes and if so, is the rule enforced. It was answered that there is a regulation, although enforcement is only carried out as feasible. There was a suggestion for additional signage stating, "Bike lanes are for bikes only".

Traffic calming was discussed both in general terms as well as in regards to specific locations. It was mentioned that there should be either traffic calming measures or more enforcement at the intersection of Huron Avenue and Appleton Street. Someone also suggested a raised crosswalk at Malcolm Street and Lake View Avenue. It was mentioned that traffic calming might help the visibility of pedestrians on Mount Auburn Street especially at the intersections with Channing and Lowell Streets. The condition of the sidewalk and curb on Channing Street was noted. The intersection of Vassal Lane

Reservoir Street and Walden Street was also mentioned as a dangerous for both vehicles and pedestrians. It was also pointed out that regional traffic seemed to be affecting the area. Staff noted that although the intersection is not slated for infrastructure or roadwork, the City is exploring the use of pavement markings to temporarily help slow vehicle speeds there. The project would be paid for through public art funding. Someone stated that the neighborhood should review any traffic calming proposals before they are implemented.

Traffic queues were noted as a problem at Mount Auburn Street towards Harvard Square, and Sparks Street, and along Huron Avenue. Suggestions included adding turning lanes, and installing speed bumps along the roadway shoulder.

There was a suggestion for more residential parking enforcement. A meeting attendee asked why parking is allowed on Memorial Drive in the vicinity of Hawthorne Street. Staff pointed out that Memorial Drive is a State controlled road. Someone suggested the formation of a separate organization to enforce traffic and parking violations.

Other transportation suggestions offered by the public included:

- Consideration should be given to bio-fuel buses especially along Concord Avenue.
- Add a “Do Not Enter” sign for certain hours on Larch Road, similar to Grozier Road.
- Add a crosswalk and or curb extension at Lowell Park. Currently the only exit is at Lexington and Brattle Streets. Curb extensions in this area would also help to keep cars out of non-travel lanes.
- Work to address ADA issues in the vicinity of Gerry’s Landing Road and Greenough Boulevard. In particular wheelchair curb cuts not matching up, and making it difficult for physically challenged persons to cross the roadways.
- Install signs regarding bicycle lanes, and parking on Memorial Drive at Hawthorne Street